

IN THE CLAIMS

Cancel claim 11.

Amend claims 9 and 21 as follows:

9. (Amended) A process for microbial leaching of a sulfidic material wherein bacteria of the genus *Thiobacillus* participate in the leaching process, and wherein the process comprises the steps of:

a) preparing an aqueous leaching fluid consisting of

at least one sulfur-containing amino acid selected from the group consisting of cysteine, methionine, homocysteine, and amides and/or esters thereof,

optionally, bacteria of the genus *Thiobacillus*,

and optionally one or more salts;

b) contacting said fluid with the sulfidic material for a length of time sufficient to achieve leaching,

wherein the bacteria are either a component of the aqueous leaching fluid of step (a), or, the bacteria are added to a discharging fluid, wherein said discharging fluid comprises the aqueous leaching fluid resulting from the performance of step (b).

10. (amended) The process of claim 9 wherein the leaching fluid includes the bacteria.

12. (amended) The process of claim 9 wherein the bacteria are added to the discharging fluid.

13. (amended) The process of claim 9 wherein, the total concentration of the at least one sulfur-containing amino acids, or amide or ester derivatives thereof, is equal to or less

than $8 \times 10^{-3}M$.

14. (amended) The process of claim 9 wherein the pH of the leaching fluid is between 1 and 4.

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15. (amended) The process of claim 14, wherein the pH of the leaching fluid is between 1.5 to 2.

16. (amended) The process of claim 9, wherein the bacteria are *Thiobacillus ferrooxidans*.

19. (amended) The process of claim 9, wherein the at least one sulfur-containing amino acid is an amide, an ester, or mixture thereof.

20. (amended) The process of claim 13, wherein the total concentration of the sulfur-containing amino acids or amide or ester derivatives thereof is equal to or less than $8 \times 10^{-3}M$.

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21. (Amended) A process for microbial leaching of a sulfidic material, wherein the process comprises the steps of:

a) preparing an aqueous leaching fluid consisting of

at least one sulfur-containing amino acid selected from the group consisting of cysteine, methionine, homocysteine, and amides and esters, thereof,

bacteria of the genus *Thiobacillus*,

and optionally one or more salts; and

b) contacting said aqueous leaching fluid with the sulfidic material for a period of time sufficient to achieve leaching.